

The Colonel Zebulon Butler Homestead
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

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COLONEL ZEBULON BUTLER HOMESTEAD
313 South River St., Wilkes-Barre
Luzerne County, Pennsylvania

As the biography of Washington is the story of the Revolution, so the life of Colonel Zebulon Butler is the History of Wyoming. Almost every letter of our annals bears the imprint of his name and the record of his deeds.

He was in full manhood when he made his first appearance on the waters of the Susquehanna. He was born at Ipswich, Massachusetts. His youth was spent at Lyme, Connecticut where his parents settled in 1736 and where he is usually alleged to have been born. Here, he engaged in the West India trade, owning one or more sloops. In the French and Indian War, he saw service, as ensign (1757) lieutenant and quartermaster (1759) and captain (1760). Ordered to Cuba in 1762, he was shipwrecked during the voyage, but arrived in time to participate in the latter part of the siege of Havana. Returning to civilian life at the close of the war, he led a band of Connecticut settlers away to the Wyoming Valley where they settled along the Susquehanna (1769) on land claimed by Connecticut by virtue of her charter and through purchase from the Indians in the ensuing Pennamite Wars between Connecticut and Pennsylvania. Soon after the contest with Great Britain ended, Butler received the appointment of lieutenant colonel of a regiment in the Connecticut line of the army and in September, 1778, he was appointed full colonel to Charles Webb's regiment.

Colonel Butler, upon his arrival here, purchased from Gershom Breed, one quarter of a share in the Susquehanna Purchase. Later, he acquired other rights. He did not bring his family to Wyoming, until 1773. At that time, a number of the principal inhabitants of Wilkes-Barre were still occupying the block house at Mill Creek. Captain Butler was one of those, and to the block house he took his family upon their arrival. In September, 1773 he moved with his family to his lot in Wilkes-Barre Town Flatt. In January, 1774, he moved into his new house. *** The house referred to, is the one in which we are interested, although the court house records show the deed for the land as not having been recorded until 1787.

The new house was a commodious two story structure of logs, which he erected in 1773 and was occupied by he and his family until 1792, when

he removed to his farmhouse at Coal Brook. In 1793, Lord Butler, his eldest son had this log building removed and part of it was embodied in the new frame residence which he built in 1793-4 on the same plot of land.

Colonel Butler acted as leader of the Connecticut settlers, serving as director of the Susquehanna Company and representing Wyoming in the Connecticut Assembly, (1774-76). In July, 1771, he laid siege to Fort Wyoming, garrisoned by Pennsylvania troops, forced its capitulation, and later repulsed Colonel Plunkett's invasion of the valley in the Battle of Nanticoke Gap. (1775).

With the outbreak of the Revolution, he was commissioned colonel of the Connecticut militia. In 1778, invasion of the Valley became imminent, and Butler, acting on behalf of the "Town of Westmoreland" appealed to the Board of War for its protection; the Wyoming regiments then being with the Continental Army. Before aid arrived, the Valley was invaded by the New York Loyalist leader, Major John Butler with an army consisting of Rangers, a detachment of Sir John Johnson's loyalist regiment (the King's Royal regiment of New York) and several hundred Indians led by the Seneca chief, Old King Sayenqueraghta. Lieutenant Colonel Butler, home on leave, on assuming command of the Continental forces, found himself at the head of barely sixty regulars and about three hundred militia consisting largely of the "undisciplined, the youthful, and the aged." He wished to await reinforcements but was overruled by his council of war and it was decided to leave Forty-Fort and seek battle, an unfortunate decision that made victory for the invaders almost a certainty. Outnumbered, and the Indians making a flank attack, the Continental forces fled to the fort. (July 3, 1778) and the armies capitulated on the following day, Colonel Butler fleeing to prevent capture. Had he surrendered, he not only would have been captured, he could not again serve under Washington.

After the departure of the invaders, Butler returned to Wyoming as commandant, where he remained during the Sullivan expedition of 1779 against the Iroquois confederacy. The expedition detached by General Sullivan, September, 1779, to destroy the Indian village east of Cayuga Lake, frequently credited to Colonel Butler, was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William Butler of the 4th Pennsylvania regiment. On December 29, 1780 Butler was recalled from Wyoming to Washington at the request of Congress to prevent any recurrence of the friction between Connecticut and Pennsylvania and was then stationed at West Point, retiring from the army at the close of the Revolution, October, 1781.

But, again, in 1783, the Pennsylvania Government sent Justice Alexander Patterson with the Rangers to take charge. He arrested Col. Butler, who had just returned from the Army, on charge of treason and sent him with a guard, to the Sunbury jail.

In September 1786, when Luzerne County was established, it was provided that until such time as a court house would be built, the holding of the courts would be at the home of Zebulon Butler in the town of Wilkes-Barre, in said County. By the 9th section of the act, Zebulon Butler was one of five appointed as Trustees to erect a Court House and County gaol or prison for the new county. At this time, he also received from the Supreme Executive Council, the honorable appointment of lieutenant of the county, which he held until the office was abrogated by the new constitution. The first court of the county was held on the 27th day of May, 1787 in the house of Zebulon Butler, situate on the corner lot of River and Northampton Sts.

Zebulon Butler was supervisor of highways of the township of Wilkes-Barre in 1789 and 1790. He was thrice married. First to Miss Ellen Lord, before his emigration from Connecticut, by whom he had two children. His second wife was Miss Johnson, daughter of the first Gospel Minister of Wyoming. They had one son. While on duty at West Point, near the close of the War, Colonel Butler married Miss Phebe Haight. Three children by this marriage survived.

Colonel Butler spent the latter portion of his life being a steady supporter of the rights of the settlers, looking confidently to the justice of Pennsylvania, to settle the existing controversy by an equitable compromise. On the 28th of July, 1795, aged 64 years, this very prominent man died at his home and was buried in the graveyard at Wilkes-Barre. Mrs. Phebe Haight Butler died at the residence of her son in Wilkes-Barre, January, 1837.

Lord Butler, eldest son of Zebulon Butler and Anne (Lord) Butler, came to Wyoming Valley in 1772. Here, he lived the remainder of his life. In October, 1778 he was appointed by his father, quartermaster of the Wyoming Post. Before June 1779, he was promoted Acting Quartermaster in the Continental establishment. When the second Yankee-Pennamite War was begun in the Autumn of 1783, Lord Butler was one of the first of the younger men to come to the front to oppose the schemes of the Pennamites. In April, 1787 the new county of Luzerne having been organized, Lord Butler was appointed by the Supreme Executive Council to serve until the election of his successor. In the following October he was elected to serve a full term as Sheriff, and in November, was duly commissioned by the Supreme Executive Council.

In May, 1780, Lord Butler was elected a first lieutenant of the Luzerne County militia. In April, 1799, he was commissioned a Brigadier General of the Pennsylvania militia. He was appointed and commissioned 1791, as the successor of Colonel Pickering, Prothonotary Clerk of the Orphan's Court and of the Court of Quarter Sessions, Register of Wills, and Recorder of Deeds in and for Luzerne County. Lord Butler was the first postmaster of Wilkes-Barre, being appointed in 1794 and holding the office until 1802, when he took his seat for one term in the Pennsylvania Legislature, as one of two representatives from Luzerne County. He was elected President of the Town Council in May, 1806. He was burgess of the borough for three years. He was County Treasurer, and one of the Commissioners of Luzerne County. He was, unquestionably, one of the most prominent men of Luzerne County. He died at the home he had built on River St., March, 1825.

The Butler Homestead is now owned by Miss Hannah Harris and is occupied by she and her sister and niece, Mrs. Louis Frank and Miss Rosalie Frank. The architecture is simple Colonial and although the house has been greatly renovated, the original plan has been followed in almost every detail. The house is of frame construction. Pitch roof, gabled and wood shingled. Under wood cornice runs a panelled soffitt. The openings for all the windows are original, but some of the sashes are not. In the few original windows remaining, there are nine small lights in top sash and six in the bottom sash. The frames are very simple. The front entrance is very simple in design, having a square, narrow glass transom. There were formerly double doors here. The entrance is original, but the heavy wood door is modern. The left portion of the building has a gabled roof in the front. The rear portion has a flat roof.

The present front stoop is modern but is almost exactly similar to the original, although it really replaced a long, low front porch with columns. On entering the house, we find a wide entrance hall with the original Colonial stairway, which is spiralled at the top. The steps are shallow and wide. Spindles, somewhat decorated, support plain smooth, flat top baluster. The newels are carved, but remain simple in design. On the first floor, to the right of the main entrance, is a wide doorway (door has been removed) having plain casement. This leads into square living room. There are two short, modern windows facing front. Originally, there were full-length French windows, similar to the one which leads from this room to the side porch. One of the old latches remains. The side porch is long and narrow with slender columns supporting the roof. There is a trap door set in floor. It is supposed to be original.

In the living room, there is one fireplace, now closed. Plain wood mantel and mouldings. A radiator has been installed in former opening. A wood ceiling cornice is modern. Doorway leads from hall and from living room to dining room. The ceiling in the dining room is very much lower than in living room. There is a door to side porch. One window faces on porch. There are two windows on the other side at left of doorway to hall. Baseboard is very narrow. This is the only one which is original. There is a modern ceiling cornice and modern door to kitchen. Kitchen has been greatly remodelled. There is a closed stairway to second floor, with the original door in kitchen. Hardware is old. Door to basement, original, and there is one original window here. There is a small gabled room at extreme rear of house, which apparently, was added at a later date.

The second floor hall is very narrow and long. The floors in this hall might be original but those throughout the remainder of the house are modern. Two steps lead to rear portion of hall and house. Originally, a door separated the two portions but at present, there is merely an opening. In the front portion, a door to the left leads to large front bedroom. Two windows face front. Another (modern) faces rear and is set under a gable. There are two clothes closets. A bathroom has been placed at direct front of hall and adjoins this room.

There are two windows and a rear stairway in the rear portion of the hall. Stairway leads to kitchen. The baluster appears to be original. A door to the left of the hall, leads to another smaller bedroom, square in design. There are two windows at the left side of the house. One clothes closet. At the extreme rear end of hall, another door leads to bedroom. Two windows face the rear. One is modern. Two others face left. There is a trap door to attic room in ceiling of this room and an original door, on a platform, which leads to a very small clothes closet. This may have been originally, another entrance to attic.

The Butler Homestead at present, is in an excellent state of preservation and the interest of its owners in keeping it so, is indeed noteworthy, as it is one of the oldest landmarks in the entire County.

Author

Approved

Date

Letitia M. R. [Signature]
Thomas H. Atwater
March 1939